DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 035 837 AC 006 351

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TITLE A MANUAL FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS IN THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS.
PUB DATE 69
NOTE 26P.

EDRS PRICE EDRS PRICE MF-$0.25 HC-$1.40
DESCRIPTORS *DISCUSSION GROUPS, *LEADERSHIP, *MANUALS, *MEETINGS, *PROGRAM PLANNING, TRAINING
IDENTIFIERS *LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

ABSTRACT

THIS MANUAL FOR GRADUATES OF LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS DISCUSSION LEADER TRAINING COURSES COVERS THE PLANNING AND DIRECTION OF MEETINGS, INCLUDING SUCH ASPECTS AS SELECTING TOPICS, OPENING DISCUSSION, STARTING MEETINGS, USEFUL ROLES OR FUNCTIONS THAT OCCUR WITHIN GROUPS, WORKING TOWARD A CONCLUSION, EVALUATING MEETINGS, AND HAVING MEMBERS PREPARE FOR THE NEXT MEETING. A BIBLIOGRAPHY IS INCLUDED. (THIS DOCUMENT IS ALSO AVAILABLE, FOR $1.00, FROM THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS, 1134 CRENSHAW BLVD., LOS ANGELES, CALIFORNIA 90019.) (LY)

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A MANUAL FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS

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League of Women Voters . . . . . Los Angeles, California

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A MANUAL FOR DISCUSSION LEADERS IN THE LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS

By

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Published by

The League of Women Voters of Los Angeles

1134 Crenshaw Blvd., L.A. 19

1.00

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PREFACE

Many of the graduates of discussion leader training courses in the League have expressed a desire to have in writing some of the main points covered in the training sessions. In the classes we stressed theory and how to "handle" certain situations, and we had some practice in leading and evaluating discussions. This is intended as a written supplement to those courses, to be referred to as practical experience makes more meaningful some of the points which didn t quite "take" at the beginning. This is not intended as a substitute for training or experience, or for the many fine books and periodicals which you may wish to read in the field of working with adult groups. By request of the graduates, this will be as brief as possible and will attempt to answer questions which have been mentioned most frequently as matters of concern.

A special acknowledgment and thanks are gratefully added at this point to the four faculty members at UCLA and the eight League members who read this manual and made valued suggestions prior to publication.

WHY THE LEAGUE EMPHASIZES DISCUSSION

We try to plan League meetings to allow every member an opportunity to participate. The philosophy behind this is inherent in our purpose "to promote informed and active participation of citizens in government." It is our belief that by promoting informed and active participation in the League, we are training our members for this type of participation in community life. The individual who helps to formulate a policy or clarify an issue is the one who is most likely to do something about it. The policy which is formulated by careful thought and the combining of many people's ideas is most likely to be a valid one. A citizenry that knows how to work together in getting facts, evaluating them, arriving at and testing conclusions in the public interest is the bulwark of a free society.

THE ROLE OF THE DISCUSSION LEADER

In our League unit meetings, we have a discussion leader and a resource person who have primary responsibility for the program. It is not our purpose in this manual to discuss the resource person's job, except that we can say generally that her responsibility is primarily with the content of the meeting. In general also, we can say that the discussion leader is responsible for establishing in each meeting the opportunity for maximum member satisfaction with that meeting. To do this, the discussion leader should be concerned with what happens before, during and after that meeting. These pages will consist of suggestions which may be helpful to the discussion leader as she opens, conducts, concludes and evaluates each meeting. None of these is her sole responsibility, yet she has a part in each. In reading this, let us assume that you have agreed to lead the discussion in your unit for the next meeting. How do you go about preparing for it?

PLANNING THE MEETING

Pre-Meeting Preparation

1. Look for newspaper articles on the subject . . . clip for possible use.

2. Read over memo or specially prepared resource material put out by the League, before you attend your briefing meeting if possible.

3. Attend briefing meeting. While there:

   a. Listen and question in terms of the unit with which you will work. What kind of background do they have? Mostly new or old members? Are there individuals in the group who have special experience or skills which can be used to point up certain issues?

   b. What goals has the City Board set for this meeting? Are conclusions expected, or is the meeting information-giving, or exploratory?

   c. What is the relationship of this unit meeting to others on the subject (preceding and following)?

   d. If possible, get to know the resource person with whom you will work.

4. Several days before your meeting, either meet with or phone your resource person. Discuss questions like these:

   a. Do you both feel comfortable with the plan for the meeting, as it applies to what each of you is to do?

   b. Go through the plan in enough detail to know where you can count on each other for help. Be frank in discussing where you feel unsure, and where you need each other.

   c. Discuss the content sufficiently so that you are sure that between you there is agreement on the main points as you see them, and that you have the answers to questions which you foresee may bother the group. (i.e., What did the League do last year on this item; some definitions of terms for new people; some information on previous action in the field; perhaps some knowledge of previous memos or kits available for members who missed previous meetings; pending legislation in the field, etc.)

   d. Be sure you are specific enough in your planning and that you test your agreement of your plans with each other to avoid later misunderstanding at the meeting. (Sample: at meeting, "Oh, I thought you were going to do that! "

5. Read through your outline and be sure that you fully understand the discussion questions you are going to pose, so that if the group does not respond to the question in the original form you can rephrase it several ways to get the point across and get the discussion going.

Remember: Your role as discussion leader varies according to the kind of meeting; (if much presentation, you have a different job than if meeting is largely exploring opinions). Although it may not be possible to do all of these steps, it is important to work with your resource person before each meeting to be sure you know how you intend to work together and what your relationship should be at this meeting. Just because you are both experienced League members and good friends does not mean automatic teamwork . . . preplanning is a must!

OPENING THE DISCUSSION

The unit chairman has said, "Our program for tonight is . . . and Nancy Jones is your discussion leader. Nancy?" And the meeting is yours.

Climate Setting . . . Arousing Interest

1. Establishing a relationship of warmth and objectivity and caring about what everyone thinks and has to say. Some ways to achieve this are:

   a. A topical story about the subject . . . one with humor if it comes off "naturally" . . . a personal incident of how you became interested in the subject (very short), reading one of your newspaper clippings and relating it to the group, "They can't settle this one in Congress, so we're going to see what we can do" . . . or "The President has asked citizens to give this problem serious consideration and adivse him" (if true) . . . or "The Fire Commission is hearing this matter next month, and if we have some ideas or information on it I'm sure they'd like to hear from us." (Be sure to check this material with your resource person before using it to insure accuracy and relationship with her material.)

   b. Your objectivity shows in your tone of voice and the type of opening remarks you make . . . Be sure you don't load your opener with such statements as "Everyone knows that the Eagleville Press doesn't approve of the Mayor's stand on this matter . . . just listen to this clipping!" (Can you see the gal in the corner who happens to agree with the clipping cringe?)

   c. Warmth and caring about what everyone has to say is best established if you really feel that way. Forget your own nervousness and really listen whenever anyone makes a comment. If someone interrupts your carefully chosen introductory remarks with a question or comment, show that you are glad to have the opportunity to clarify the point, or bring a new resource into the meeting.

2. Relate today's discussion to the individual:

   a. When and how they chose the item as a current agenda . . . some of the thinking behind it.

   b. The importance of the item to the individual's daily life (or the husband's business) as well as importance to the community.

Clear setting of goals for the meeting (as established at briefing meeting). A resume of what is to be covered in the meeting, its relationship to other League meetings on the subject (past and future), what is expected of the members at this particular meeting (i.e., "Our goal is to decide if rubbish collection should be a municipal service. . . Along the way we will be asked to make several decisions as to feasibility of various plans in use elsewhere, as applied to our community. . . By the end of this meeting we should be able to make some specific recommendations to the board on these questions." . . . or, "Today's meeting opens the subject of school financing. Since this is such a large field, the board has planned three meetings on the subject. It is our hope that you will attend all three so that as we accumulate information during the first two meetings we will be able to make some general policy recommendations at the third. Today we will not be seeking conclusions, but trying to clarify our thinking and add to our knowledge on the specific subject of financing school building.")

Note: Test communications at this point with some such question as, "Are we all agreed that we are seeking information only today, and that at our third meeting we will seek conclusions?" or "Are we agreed that we will confine curselves today to learning about school construction financing only and that we will hold other aspects of financing until the next meeting?"

VARIATIONS IN STARTING THE MEETING

(Many of these suggestions may be used during, as well as at the beginning of, the meeting.)

1. Brief presentation by resource person, followed by questions from the group or the discussion leader.

2. Start with a question from the discussion leader to get group thinking and let them ask questions which involve answers either from the group or resource person.

In either of these cases, discussion leader must be armed with a few provocative questions (which can be restated or reworded if they don't have the desired result). Starting a question with such a phrase as "If you were on the school board . . . " or "Have any of you had experience with . . . " makes them more provocative. Do not give up too easily if discussion doesn't start immediately; sometimes silence means deep thought. Give the group a chance before you start rewording.

3. A sample skit or role playing of a problem can often help make an abstract issue more real. (i.e., "aid to injured industries" is abstract, but having members of the group play a town meeting in an injured community with all groups represented makes the problem real and personal.) This can be done with a written script and parts assigned, or setting the stage for the total group to actually be something else, like a school board or a legislative committee.

4. Buzz sessions are especially good for groups of over 15 where you want to give everyone a chance to express ideas in a short period of time. Best for getting a lot of ideas or suggestions out quickly. Also good with a new group where people do not know each other well. In using this, be certain that each group knows exactly what it is to do, how long it has, and who is to report back. Excellent to use when the group seems to be disintegrating into a lot of little side conversations on a matter of great interest . . . let them talk it out informally in buzz groups, report their thinking, then the whole group is together to proceed.

5. Brainstorming -- this is where the discussion leader wants a lot of creative thinking and new ideas, which can be sifted later for practicality. Would be excellent for a meeting on "How to Take World Trade Item to the Community." Group is asked to come up with any ideas they have from top of the head, without usual cautions of "considering time, woman-power and finance." Might be used on some such question as, "What could the U. S. Government do with its stored agricultural surpluses?"

Caution: To be successful, there must be absolutely no evaluation of each suggestion. All must be accepted as equally valid. This is just a listing of ideas.

6. Visual Aids -- These may be pre-prepared charts, or flannel boards which are added to during the discussion, or crayon and newsprint or blackboard used to illustrate points as they come up. One ingenious way of having a place to write is to take a roll of 18" shelf paper and hang it over a centrally located door. Shutting the door will hold it in place and new paper may be drawn from the roll as it lies on the floor behind the closed door. (Caution: Use black crayon or grease pencil . . . write large . . . be sure visual aids are visible.) Films, records, tape recordings - all can be worked into meetings but are not usually used by a League discussion leader unless it has been planned by the League for the item and facilities made available.

7. Listening teams or point-of-view teams -- Ask two people to listen to a presentation with some specified advance purpose like: One could listen as a business man might, one as a housewife. And ask some questions after a resource presentation from that point of view. Groups can be divided for listening purposes as well this way. Point-of-view teams could be used with advance material provided them to react to a given discussion question from specified points of view (pro and con, farmer, laborer, etc.) before the total group started to discuss a question.

8. Quiz, or agree-disagree statements -- These are passed out to the members to fill out before the discussion starts and may serve to arouse interest because they aren't sure how to answer all of the questions. Or agree-disagree statements can be filled out before the meeting and then again after, to see if there have been opinion changes as results of the discussion.

9. The problem census -- This is a listing of the problem areas in a subject as the group sees them at the beginning of the meeting, and can help the discussion leader in pointing up main issues in the meeting. Should not be used unless the leader clearly states the purpose for which she intends it. If the group is free to decide where it wants to put its time, then the group will discuss the list and either vote or generally agree on the order in which it proceeds. If the group is not free to determine content (as in many League meetings where we should all be working on the same subject in each unit) this may be used to point up areas of concern and set up guideposts for the discussion.

Remember: People learn in different ways; they participate in different ways. Variation in discussion method and program planning will make the meetings more interesting, and more profitable to many kinds of people.

Note: If you and your resource person intend to use members of the group to ask questions or read material previously assigned, make every effort to send them the material in advance of the meeting so that they can read it over and feel comfortable with it in advance of their "public appearance."

ROLES OR FUNCTIONS WHICH HELP MAKE A GROUP PRODUCTIVE

You are not alone. In your role as discussion leader, you have somewhat the same relationship to the group as an orchestra conductor. Playing no instrument himself, he helps the instrument players create a whole that is greater than the sum of its parts. So, too, the discussion leader serves as an enabler, and a helper to the group; she serves by bringing out what is in others, by coordinating the contributions, by calling for a little more volume in certain areas, and signaling for a muted effect from others. An orchestra leader, however, is fully familiar with the instruments in the orchestra; he knows his music well enough to know what is needed to get the desired effect. In a discussion group, too, the leader knows there are many functions or jobs to be done which need to be performed if a group discussion is to be productive. You are not expected to do them, but you are expected to be able to see the need for these functions at a given time, try to encourage their performance by members of the group, and, if necessary, perform a needed function yourself.

None of us is equally good in each role, but we list them here for two reasons:

1. To help you in diagnosing the need of the group at a given time.
2. To remind you of the range of roles that may be needed in a group and encourage you, when leading or participating, to try to vary the ones you perform -- to extend your own range of comfortable group roles.

Task roles: (to facilitate content coverage)

1.	Initiator-Contributor	(suggests, proposes, ideas and plans)
2.	Information Seeker	(asks for clarification, facts, information)
3.	Information Giver	(supplies facts or experience, "resource person")
4.	Opinion Seeker	(asks for clarification of values, standards)
5.	Opinion Giver	(supplies beliefs, states "I think")
6.	Elaborator	(develops others' ideas, sees how it will work)
7.	Summarizer	(pulls together ideas, combines information)
8.	Technician	(physical arranger, operates equipment, sees to comfort)
9.	Recorder	(group memory of group thinking, planning, "secretary," lists areas of agreement and disagreement)
10.	Disagreer	(this category was added by one of the training groups which felt that disagreement was a positive group role when it prodded the group to analyze its thinking)

Group Maintenance roles: (to facilitate group and individual satisfaction)

1.	Encourager	(praises, agrees, accepts others' ideas)
2.	Harmonizer	(mediates, relieves tension)
3.	Compromiser	(comes half way, yields status, admits error)
4.	Expediter	(encourages and facilitates participation of others)
5.	Observer and Commentator	(records troup process, feeds back to group when needed for evaluation, i.e., "I wonder if we could move along better if we accepted one definition of this term just for the purpose of this discussion; we seem to be bogged down in definitions." or "A lot of us seem to want to talk this over with our neighbor while we jell some ideas. Could we just talk with a few people around us?")
6.	Follower	(goes with group, passively accepts decisions, listens attentively)

Notes:

1. The discussion group will be more productive and feel better about itself if many people share in assuming these "leadership functions." If the discussion leader does not jump into the breach too quickly and honestly encourages others to assume these roles, she will be achieving what is known in the lingo as "shared leadership."

2. In the last analysis, the discussion leader is expected by the group to see that necessary functions are performed. Shared leadership does not mean abdication of responsibility on the part of the designated leader.

3. These roles should not be regarded as stereotypes. No person should be playing any one role the whole time, but should move from one to another.

SOME PROBLEM SITUATIONS

Many problem situations can be avoided by anticipating them in advance and sharing your hopes for the discussion with the group. For instance, a statement at the beginning saying that "The purpose of today's meeting is to find out what all of the members are thinking on this issue - so let's see if we can avoid speaking a second time to a point until all the others who wish to contribute have had their chance," or "We know that in this group we have a lot of visitors and new members; we are especially anxious for them to contribute their views on this issue, since some of us have been working on it for so long we may have forgotten how others might view the subject." Once the discussion is under way some of the following suggestions may be helpful.

Late-comers: A brief pause to let them get settled is necessary; you've lost the group momentarily anyhow. A sentence or two like, "We've talked about our plans for the next meeting and we're now discussing suggestions for next year's national current agenda" is sufficient. It is bad practice to review in any detail, since this will be unfair to those who have been there. The latecomer must make the adjustment and reconcile herself to missing something as the penalty for being late.

Newcomers to the group: It should be group policy to see that every newcomer has a chance to really talk with one or two members before the meeting so that she gets a feeling that someone cares about her, and so she feels that they are not hard to talk with. She will then feel freer to participate later. If the group socializes during or after the meeting, this personal contact should be deliberately fostered then too. It is not enough to introduce the newcomer by name and assure her you are glad she is here and to feel "free to participate." Name tags, car pools, etc. help. Do not overwhelm her with the urgent need to participate; let her listen and adjust for awhile if she wishes to. She needs to get the feel of the group and see where she fits in.

When discussion is slow in coming, do we call on someone by name? There are two schools of thought on this, but, by and large, it is desirable to call on someone by name only when you, as discussion leader, know that that person has particular background in that field and she shows some evidence of desire to speak. However, a general comment can help, like "some of you haven't stated your opinions on this; shall we assume you agree, or are there some puzzling points that are disturbing you and keeping you from feeling fully comfortable with this conclusion?" -- and a good long pause for them to marshal their thoughts.

When the group gets bogged down with definitions: Don't let your group go too long on this. As soon as a few have been tossed in the hopper, try to get the sense of the comments and toss in what you consider a workable definition for the purpose of this particular discussion, asking the group to go along with it, although admitting its imperfections. Attempts to define are only useful when the point being discussed is not high up on the abstraction ladder. Usually, "Can you give an example of that?" is a better question than, "How would you define that?"

Missing facts: If the group does not have the information to answer a question don't let them worry the bone too long. This can be handled by saying, "Since none of us seem to know for sure, will someone volunteer to look this up for us for the next meeting?" (or ask the resource person to do so). Be absolutely certain that the question is answered at the next meeting, even if meeting is on another subject.

When the group seems restless: There are many reasons for this; some instances:

1. If the air is smoky or stuffy, or seating is inadequate, take two minutes out to throw open the windows, change seats, etc.
2. If the subject doesn't seem to interest them, throw in a question on the "let's pretend" side, like, "We've been awfully abstract about this tariff problem, let's suppose you were a farmer and - etc." This provides a change of pace and perspective. Think of your list of variations (pages 4 and 5).
3. If they've been dwelling on one aspect too long, it's time to move on.

People who drift out early: It is always well to know if some of your people have to leave early. Then you can state at the beginning that some will be leaving to pick up children at kindergarten, or whatever the reason, but that you assume the rest are planning to stay till scheduled closing time. It might be well to check, and if a sizeable number are leaving early try to leave some interesting but less vital material to the end, but cover the necessary material earlier. If this is a regular problem with the group, they should consider changing their meeting time to an earlier hour. Recognizing the situation openly in advance is better than the slow disintegration of a group that takes place if people drift out one at a time or sit on the edge of the chair waiting to leave as soon as opportunity presents itself.

Remember: Your job is to make the members of the group feel comfortable in their coming and going as well as staying. If they are not, they just stay home the next time.

The silent ones: Our purpose is to make it comfortable and possible for everyone to participate. It is not mandatory for each person to verbalize at every meeting.

1. If silence is caused by lack of knowledge of the subject . . . you can help by suggesting some interesting reading for the next meeting during the social time or by throwing out certain kinds of questions to the group occasionally which allow for participation on a different plane (i.e., "Let's see how many of our husbands' businesses are affected by the U.S. trade policy in any way." . . . and get answers from lots of people.)
2. If silence is caused by confusion as to just where the group is at the moment . . . the discussion leader can help by periodic summaries of just what it is we're talking about at this point, and then asking a specific question again, which gets the whole group on the same point at the same time.

3. If silence is caused by not understanding the discussion . . . the leader can help by periodic requests for questions from the group; "Is this clear, or is there some part of this any of you want to question or to clarify? "

4. If silence is caused by slowness to phrase a thought in a quick talking group . . . the leader and other members can help by "holding a little time" . . . a pause does not have to be filled up fast, if the group realizes this may be a good time for shy Jane to marshal her thoughts and come up with a comment. "Some of us need a little time to think that over, " can hold some time open.

5. If silence is caused by shyness . . . the leader must be certain that when shy Jane shows signs of wanting to talk she is called on, and does not have to compete in the market place of those who have stronger voices and quicker reactions. If the point is forced to wait too long, she will not make it because it will have lost its meaning, or someone else will have said it. Some people will not speak unless called on; they raise their hands to get the leader's attention. While others slide in easily on the previous speaker's pause for breath. Neither is "right" or "wrong, " but the discussion leader must be certain that both get equal opportunity. Don't call on anyone unless you're pretty sure they won't be embarrassed by your doing so.

The over-participant: Since it is our goal to make everyone comfortable in the meeting, we have to recognize that, just as some are more comfortable silent, others are uncomfortable unless they verbalize their thinking. Our job is to help our verbal members to use this facility in a way which is pleasant for them and productive and helpful for the group. Verbalizing frequently is not necessarily over-participation. Speech which does not help the group move toward its goal, or which leads it in other directions (less profitable ones), or which takes too long a time in relation to the value of the idea to the group . . . these forms may be considered over-participation.

1. The dominant one . . . whose answer to a question seems to still all other voices. The discussion leader can, in refusing to be overawed, ask for other points of view, or if necessary she or the resource person can bring in another viewpoint. (i.e., "That's one side of it; would someone like to comment on how the farmers might feel about that view? ")

2. The repeater . . . who says it once, twice, and then "in other words, " again. The discussion leader can, if she gets the gist of it the first or second time, slide in just before the replay starts again with a brief summary of the point and its relation to the question under discussion. This is not a snide trick, but often a help. The repeater usually does so because she feels she has not made herself clear, so when the discussion leader comes in with a neat summary or re-phrasing, the repeater is pleased at having gotten over her idea.

3. The wanderer . . . who has the germ of an idea but has not thought it through before she starts to speak. She may be helped by waiting until she has expressed enough of the idea to communicate it, then the discussion leader may come in with, "Are you saying that . . .," or, "Do you mean that . . .," or "Could you show us how that would work in this situation?" Any of these or other similar questions can help the wanderer to clarify in her own mind the thought she is trying to express. If it does not so serve, she may often decide to wait until she has thought it through some more before going on with the idea. The discussion leader has helped her test her own idea.

4. The tangent gal . . . who comes up with, "That just reminded me of so and so," and goes off onto a point which is only dimly related to the subject of discussion, or which is related but leads the group into a different aspect of the subject which was not planned for this meeting. She may be helped by a question to the group immediately after her comment, which leads the discussion back onto the track. Or if the relationship to the subject is obscure to the discussion leader, the discussion leader may ask her to relate it to the subject with a question like, "Do you mean that you think Dr. X's statement on UNESCO must be considered by the group in order to make a valid decision on this point?" Or, in some cases, it is well to let the tangential comment pass with no comment, but inject a summary of where we are at this point in the discussion. Sometimes a seeming tangent is an important and relevant issue, and if the group seems to wish to pursue it, this should be allowed, as long as the discussion leader tells the group that by so doing they will have to give up some other part of the planned program, because of time. (This should not be done unhappily by the discussion leader, but in the spirit of genuine willingness to abide by the group's choice. If no choice is possible, it should not be offered to the group.)

Note: Several of these types -- over-participant, wanderer, etc. -- can be better kept in bounds if a blackboard is used. This makes ideas visible, gives assurance that a point has been made, etc.

5. The story teller . . . Personal experience and anecdotes are valuable to a group, and often make up in group warmth and friendship what they take away in time. However, when the stories get too long, or there are too many of them, the discussion leader should say warmly and sincerely that we wish we had time for all of us to share these experiences, but because of the long program maybe we had better wait until the social hour when we can hear all about Suzie's trip to Europe.

6. The insecure talker . . . Often the injection of seemingly irrelevant comments or rambling observations is caused by an individual's feeling of insecurity in the group. If everyone can be made to feel that she has a place and is really accepted by the others this kind of "feeling around" for a "place in the sun" can be substantially reduced. This type of over-participant may be helped by praise for a contribution to the discussion or by being asked to prepare something for the next meeting or to take notes for a summary or even to act as hostess -- something to give her a place, some status in the group. (It is helpful

to assign an experienced and an inexperienced person to do jobs together, so that the new one has someone to look to for help. Even the simplest job can look formidable if you don't feel the security of someone who specifically agreed to be your partner.)

7. The lone dissenter . . . She should be considered an asset rather a "problem situation." It is important that the discussion leader help the group to appreciate the voice of dissent and treat it with respect, a comment like -- "That really sets me thinking about this in a new way," or "I'll bet a lot of people have that viewpoint. I wonder if we could think along those lines for a while," or "That really poses a challenge to the way we've been talking. One of my neighbors was saying that the other day and I really couldn't answer her" -- can help the group to see the dissenter as a valuable asset to their thinking. It is important that she should not be made to feel an obstructionist or a lone wolf, but to feel that she does play a necessary role in the total group deliberation. Here is a basic key to promoting and enlarging the necessary cross-section in League membership.

Notes:

1. If you assign someone to note-taking, or some other job to reduce over-participation, be certain in your own mind that you feel you are doing it to help her as well as the group, and look for other ways of helping your gal to participate constructively. Being "secretary" should not be considered in the same class as group banishment to Siberia. It is neither permanent nor punishment; it can be helpful in learning to consolidate several comments into a major point, keeping track of the discussion as it progresses, learning to really listen to others, and many other valuable group skills.

2. Reminder: Most of the comments and helps that have been suggested for so-called problem situations may be done by any member of the group. They are listed as tools for discussion leaders for two reasons: (a) Discussion leaders are also participants in many other meetings, and (b) If no one else in group picks up the cue, the discussion leader must come in and help the group move around these problem situations.

3. If you ask a group or individual to put off a point until later in the discussion for any reason, it is mandatory that that point be brought up later, even if all you say is, "Eleanor, have we covered that point you brought up earlier (and state it)."

THE ESSENCE OF A GOOD RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN THE DISCUSSION LEADER AND HER GROUP IS IN HER GENUINE INTEREST IN AND CONCERN FOR THEM AS PEOPLE, AND IN HER ABSOLUTE HONESTY AND SINCERITY IN WORKING WITH THEM. A GROUP MUST TRUST THE DISCUSSION LEADER . . .

This section has been written to help the discussion leader help the members of her group. It is not a bag of tricks or gimmicks with which to "get rid of" problems.

WORKING TOWARD A CONCLUSION

Steps in problem solving:

1. Awareness that you have a problem.
2. Defining and locating the problem.
3. Get the facts and information needed.
4. Evaluation of the information.
5. Possible solutions.
6. Evaluation of possible solutions.
7. Agreement on one solution.
8. Testing of that solution in terms of timing, personnel and financing.

Sometimes the "best" solution is not possible of execution, and requires modification in practical terms of carrying it out.

Groups rarely go through these steps in an orderly fashion; there may be some skipping around. But it is helpful to keep these steps in mind, since an omitted one may be the key to group difficulty in problem solving and help the discussion leader in diagnosing the group difficulty.

How the discussion leader can help the group to move toward a conclusion:

1. The use of the interim summary is a basic tool here. As each phase in our steps toward a conclusion seems to have been explored, we summarize what we have accomplished and what we are ready for next.

2. Judicious use of questions helps a group move forward (i.e., in a discussion on what we shall do to reduce the huge government holdings of farm surpluses the discussion leader might ask, "Would it be helpful to list just what surpluses the government is storing?" or if someone suggests that we send all our wheat surplus to Korea, "Does anyone know if the Koreans want wheat?" or key questions which help a group to evaluate are, "How would that work," or "How would the farmers (or any other group) feel about that?" etc.).

3. The discussion leader may ask the resource person for more information if she feels the group is bogging down on a point for lack of information. (By and large, the resource person will interject new information as she sees it is needed, without being asked; but sometimes the discussion leader may ask for some particular type of information if she feels it is needed.)

4. Summarizing several comments to relate them to the goal is helpful in moving the group forward. Often a series of comments will be made which are interesting but seem not to have a clear relationship to the goal of the meeting. The discussion leader may say something like, "Well, we seem to feel that the problem of where to locate the incinerators will cause a lot of trouble, but could we now direct our attention to the problem of whether incinerators are a good idea?" or "We know there are both good and bad public officials, but could we, for the purposes of this discussion, assume that the officials who will carry out this legislation are competent, and try to look at this bill in that light."

Area of Agreement: In the League we use this term to mean the point in our discussion when everyone feels she can go along with what is proposed, even though it may not be exactly what she wants. It means that at this point each member is satisfied that careful consideration has been given to varying points of view and that within the framework of that variation, the group has reached agreement on at least part of the problem, or has come up with a new and acceptable solution. The areas of agreement of a group may be both positive and negative, i.e., "We all agree that we ought to support the school bond issue but some of us feel that the school board is being short sighted in asking for so little, and they ought to plan for a longer period in advance. We would like to explore this phase further." or "In this group there is an area of agreement on the bond issue, but not on the related issue of over-all Board of Education plans." or "In this group we could have an area of agreement as to the general principles of bond financing for school construction, but we might not have agreement on a particular bond issue." The job of the discussion leader is to help the group recognize, define and expand the areas in which there is agreement on an issue. She is not supposed to try to "push the group to a conclusion." She may help by redefining the problem or stating it in a different way. If reaching agreement is the goal of the meeting, she must be especially alert to pick up areas of agreement as they emerge and test them with the group as the discussion proceeds.

Voting: Since we are trying to define and recognize and build these areas in which we can agree by exploring new possibilities, rearranging our thinking in light of new evidence, etc., we do not usually take votes in League discussions. Voting tends to harden our thinking toward a choice of one of two alternatives, and leaves a minority which may not be happy with the choice. However, voting is a convenient and often necessary machinery to use at certain times. Some such situations might be:

1. When we have a procedural choice to make -- shall we adjourn early today, or stay till the end; shall we serve coffee after our meetings. Valuable time can be saved by a quick show of hands on such matters.

2. When a decision has to be made at a certain time on a yes or no matter, or after discussion of the pros and cons on a particular bill which cannot be amended, a vote helps the minority to register its feelings and measure the extent of its support. It also helps the majority to see if its position is firmly enough based to warrant a large campaign in support of this position. (If much womanpower is required, more than tacit agreement or bare majority must be present.)

3. Of course voting is necessary in large meetings or those conducted under parliamentary procedure, if a final decision must be made.

4. Voting is helpful in assessing major areas of concern such as in a problem census, where the group lists many possible suggestions and then a show of hands (with each person voting maybe several times) gives the group an indication of which subjects are of most general interest to the group.

5. When time has run out and area of agreement has been difficult to assess, voting can help clarify group recommendations and give the group some feeling of accomplishment, if the goal was to reach some decision.

In small, informal groups, voting is rarely necessary because it is easier to assess the total thinking,and actually to see by visual clues like nodding and head-shaking, that a group agrees.

It is important in working with a group on this basis that the discussion leader carefully summarize what she thinks are points of agreement and give the members of the group ample opportunity to agree or disagree with her evaluation of the agreement. A quick summary, ending with, "The meeting is adjourned, cuts off the necessary group reaction and testing of the leader's understanding of group thinking, which is necessary to be certain of summary accuracy and completeness. If you are having trouble recognizing or isolating the agreement areas, it is well to summarize frequently, saying, "Now am I right in supposing that we all agree on this? or "Have we agreed on this issue, or are there other considerations that we have not discussed? "

ENDING THE MEETING

The use of a recorder: Some discussion leaders prefer to work with a recorder and use her to make periodic and/or final summaries. Some prefer to use the recorder as a record keeper for the written report on the meeting that goes to the Board and for reference if needed at the meeting; in this case the discussion leader does her own summary. The use of the recorder will vary with the content of the meeting and the discussion leader's own preference. It is imperative that the discussion leader and the recorder clearly understand what each will do.

Some check points to consider in formulating your summary:

1. In terms of the goal set at the beginning of the meeting
   a. How far have you covered the subject?
   b. What areas of agreement have you reached?
   c. Are there questions which need further clarification or research?
   d. What areas of disagreement are there?
2. In terms of follow-up on the meetings -
   a. What do you hope this meeting has accomplished for the League?
   b. What do you hope this meeting has accomplished for the individual?
   c. How can it be used by the individual (relationship to news of the day, better understanding, individual letters to Congressmen, preparation for a future meeting, more individual reading to clarify or extend range of thinking, talk to neighbors and family, etc.)?

These points are the raw material of which the final summation is made. You may not put all of this into each summary, but one which has a good part of this is most likely to send your members off feeling satisfied with their accomplishment and with the League, and perking with a feeling of wanting to do something about it.

MEMBER PREPARATION FOR NEXT MEETING

Caution: There should still be time, within the limits of the meeting, for premeeting involvement of the members for the next meeting. Some of our training groups have listed suggested approaches to this problem. While not complete, nor always applicable, this may help spark some of your own creative thinking on the problem, "How can we get the members to prepare for the meeting in advance?" These are some ideas to use at the previous meeting.

1. Timely topics -- a reference to the news of the day and the tie in with the next meeting. Suggest that they read and clip articles concerning it.
2. Post one or more provocative questions.
3. Ask them to come prepared with questions on the next subject.
4. Outline what is planned for next meeting.
5. Bring in some news clippings; show them that the President is gravely concerned over this, or some other important person.
6. Show the group the importance of the subject in relation to the League - what we could accomplish in our community with this.
7. Tell members where or how the desired information can be obtained.
8. Give each one an advance fact sheet on the next subject.
9. Try to involve several people in the presentation for the next meeting.
10. Ask group to talk over issue with husband or friends and bring their reaction to the coming topic or some specific question.

*11. Use soap opera approach, "Will Helen marry John," suspense technique.

*12. A puzzle, quiz, or scrambled sentence kind of question to be worked out for the next meeting.

*These are "fun" things to do, not intended however to degrade or cheapen the seriousness of the subject.

The role of an informed citizen and discussion participant need not be grim, but neither should it be free of intellectual stretching and real effort.

Note: If anything is assigned for the next meeting, be absolutely certain that your meeting plan allows time for this material to be used or brought in in some way. Again, remember these are not "gimmicks," they are plans for a part of the meeting - the preparation part. They are legitimate and an important part of the next meeting.

Note: The discussion leader should not plan this member preparation for the next meeting alone. In most cases the resource person for the next meeting, or the unit chairman, will plan it. It is included here as a reminder and stimulant to insure that it is done.

EVALUATION OF THE MEETING

To promote group growth, to be certain of member satisfaction, to encourage flexibility and ability to change on the part of the leadership . . . an important part of every meeting is the post-meeting evaluation. This may be done by member reaction slips, oral group evaluation of the meeting, or subcommittee evaluation, but it should be specifically planned for the end of each meeting.

Member evaluations: Periodically the members may be asked to answer questions in writing, unsigned, such as:

1. Rate this meeting on a sliding scale of 1 to 5 (1 - lowest, 5 - highest).
2. What did you like best about this meeting (or find most valuable)?
3. Any suggestions for improving our meetings?
4. Comments on the meeting.

It is not necessary to use more than two or three of these questions at any meeting, but variety can keep the answers less perfunctory and more thoughtful. It is well, if you can, to report back to the group at the next meeting, a summary of how it evaluated the last one.

Committee evaluations: It is helpful if the discussion leader, resource person, unit chairman and any others who wish meet a few minutes after the meeting to assess it and, if there are member reaction slips, to analyze them together. Criteria might be:

1. Climate of the meeting.
2. Clear goals.
3. Quality of resource material and discussion leader's use.
4. Participation.
5. Fulfillment of goals.

Points to be considered in evaluation:

1. Relate this meeting to other meetings of this particular group in terms of its own progress (although every unit must maintain League standards, comparison with other units is often deceptive and misleading in terms of planning for the future growth and development of this group).
2. Don't torture yourselves with dwelling on what you consider "bad"; try to analyze problem situations by considering some alternative ways in which you might have acted, as a help to the future.
3. Remember, one man's meat is another man's poison. You will see from your member reaction slips that you won't ever be able to satisfy everyone.
4. See if there are any lessons learned from this meeting that can be used to improve planning for the next.

5. If you have recommendations to the Board in regard to content, timing, meeting plans, etc., as a result of your experience with the material you had for this meeting, be sure to send them in with your unit report.

6. Know why you want to evaluate. What decisions will you make in the future for which data is necessary? Don't evaluate for its own sake.

7. When evaluation data influences decisions, tell members about it. (e.g., "Because a number of people suggested . . . . we have changed plans to . . . . ")

LIMITATIONS

1. The discussion process is not the be-all and end-all of learning and doing. There are times for lectures and speeches and reading and individual thinking. Discussion is best for bringing out differences in interpretation, values and philosophies. It is helpful in expanding our horizons through understanding different backgrounds and experiences. It helps us look at ideas in different ways.

2. We must accept the fact that every discussion has limitations. There are limitations in content, in time allotment, in organizational needs, in people, in the discussion method itself.

In content: In a meeting which is on the structure of the U.N., we cannot agree to go off and discuss disarmament, fascinating though it may be.

In time: We cannot spend half of our meeting time on what is the nature of "truth" when we have set for ourselves the goal of tracing freedom of speech and press through the history of our country . . . in two hours.

In organizational needs: We cannot change the subject matter for discussion in our unit, since the effectiveness of a decentralized organization lies in pooling the thinking of all the units in arriving at a position or determining an activity. The total organization depends on the quality of the response from each of its parts.

In people: People differ in their knowledge of the topic, ability to verbalize, interest in the subject, their own reasons for being there. We cannot expect any two groups to have the same discussion in the same way.

In the discussion method itself: Agreement is slow and hard to get. Objectivity and the scientific approach are hard to combine with feelings and emotions. Sometimes discussion is not the best way of achieving the goal of a meeting.

3. The discussion leader is not possessed of supernatural powers. There will always be some groups that start and remain "cold" despite her best efforts. There will always be some individuals who do not operate well in a group and who cannot be helped to become good participants. Growth in experience and skills will help solve more problem situations, but there are bound to be some that defy the most experienced leader. Let's not expect perfection.

4. Shared leadership is a growing and gradual process. In groups which vary greatly from meeting to meeting, in personnel, more help will be required from the discussion leader. Stable groups are more likely to work productively together without too much direction from the discussion leader.

5. We must realize that each of us has a different personality and that each discussion leader will have a different "style" of working with a group. What comes naturally to one will fall flat with another. We have to accept our own limitations too, and work with what we have.

6. Although the discussion leader should try to make it possible for group members to share leadership functions, she is responsible to the League as an organization to see to it that the goals for the meeting are achieved insofar as possible. There are times when she must be firm in setting limits and the group must accept them. There are times when she does not have to do much because the group is operating effectively and productively, but she must be alert to the group's need for direction and provide it when needed. She must keep in mind that her responsibility is to the total group, and must not be diverted by her desire to help individuals, when satisfying the individual will not be in the best interests of the group as a whole.

YOU AND YOUR GROUP

There are certain things you can do to help a group. Most of these the group itself can do for itself as it works together and learns to feel comfortable with its working patterns and personnel.

A group has certain properties and strengths of its own. Group pressure or cohesiveness can set up "rules for behavior" of the group in such a way as to minimize many of the "problem situations" we have discussed. Although none of this is written down, it becomes the "accepted way." A warm and friendly group which accepts ideas thoughtfully can encourage full participation. A group which works together gets to have security, knowing what to expect of each other and at what levels each member operates. They spend less time "feeling each other out," and more time on the problems at hand.

You, as a discussion leader, cannot create this kind of a group, but you can create a climate by your own attitudes, in which this kind of a group can emerge.

You can help the group to recognize its accomplishments so that they don't get bogged down in the inevitable frustration that accompanies learning.

By your enthusiasm, through your summaries, you can help your group to feel the tremendous exhilaration implicit in significant discussion. If the group can feel that their opinions are the very fabric of a democratic society, that citizen decision-making is the key to government which truly rests on the consent of the governed, then our discussion takes on

proportion and significance beyond the living room of a neighbor's house, beyond the group of Leaguers in a single room. They will realize that the lay citizen, as well as the expert, has a part to play in government policy making, and that sound discussions leading to workable solutions demand both opinion and resource "facts."

You can help the group to understand the choices it must make; you cannot make their choices for them.

You can expect of yourself only that you will care enough about the group to think about them with deep concern and help them as fully as you can while you are their leader. In this process you will of necessity have less time to think of yourself. If you choose to help groups in this spirit, the rewards to you and to the League will be richly satisfying. We have a feeling these attitudes will stay with you when you are not the designated leader of a group, and that you will experience increased effectiveness and satisfaction in participation in group activity.

The End

But there is no ending really . . . because as long as you are working with people in groups, and as long as you care to learn and grow, your learning will continue. We hope this has been a helpful set of guideposts along the learning trail.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

There is much valuable material in this field, a good deal of the most usable for lay people appearing in pamphlet form. You will find conflicting points of view in some and ideas which seem to you "visionary and impractical" in others. Reading in this field will broaden your thinking and help you develop your own personal philosophy of leadership. It will not, and should not be expected to, provide definite answers; you will have to "try those on for size" as the occasions arise. The excitement and stimulation of adult leadership lies in this very factor. You never reach the point where you know all the answers; this process of constant change and growth makes leadership especially rewarding because, in the process of giving, you get so much yourself.

Following is a list of books and periodicals which you may find stimulating and rewarding to further thinking in this field.

Books

(Available in Public Library)

Chase, Stuart, Roads to Agreement, Harpers, 1951.

A good basic philosophy builder and interesting reading.

Fansler, Thomas, Creative Power Through Discussion. New York: Harper and Bros., 1950.

Gordon, Thomas, Group Centered Leadership. New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1955.

Haiman, Franklyn, Group Leadership and Democratic Action. Cambridge: Riverside Press, 1951.

This is not the kind of reading which you "just can't put down," but it is a fine, thought-provoking book which you will want to read a little at a time. Excellent material.

Kelley, Earl C., The Workshop Way of Learning. New York: Harper and Bros., 1951.

Laird, Donald A. and Eleanor C., The Techniques of Handling People, Revised Edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., 1954.

Lane, Howard, and Mary Beauchamp, Human Relations in Teaching. New York: Prentice-Hall Inc., 1955.

Schmidt, Warren, and Paul Buchanan, Techniques that Produce Teamwork. New London: Croft Publications, 1955.

A readable book for administrators and committee chairmen; good material for League leaders.

Strauss, Bert and Francis, New Ways to Better Meetings. New York: The Viking Press, 1951, p. 177.

Easily readable material, but can be confusing unless you are careful to weed out ideas which do not apply to groups with more or less fixed schedules. Good, practical "how to do it" ideas.

Trecker, Audrey and Harleigh, How to Work with Groups. New York: Womans Press, 1952.

Pamphlets

From the Adult Education Association, 743 North Wabash Ave., Chicago 11, Illinois.

How to Lead Discussions
Planning Better Programs
Understanding How Groups Work
How to Use Role Playing and other Tools for Learning
How to Teach Adults (not all applicable, but interesting)

(Single copy: 60¢ Mixed titles: 2 for $1 3 to 24: 40¢ each)

Also from Adult Education Association (above) comes:

ADULT LEADERSHIP, a monthly magazine (10 issues per year), subscription: $5 per year. This magazine has been in existence for 4 years and has been a gold mine of specific suggestions and thought-provoking ideas. The pamphlet series (above) are largely taken from articles printed in this magazine during the first four years. (Bound copies of the first two years' issues in League office on loan.)

Leading Group Discussion (supplementary readings)

Center for the Study of Liberal Education for Adults, 940 E. 59th St., Chicago 37, Illinois. No price is given on these, but the material is excellent. The Supplement, especially, has some thought-provoking material. The Handbook is very practical and down to earth. These are tools for leading learning groups only, though they are for groups which do not seek conclusions or action. This gives a different emphasis.

Group Dynamics and Social Action, 1950 Freedom Pamphlet, B'Nai Brith Anti-Defamation League, 212 Fifth Ave., New York 10, N.Y. 25¢

A Manual for Discussion Leaders and Participants, Community Services in Adult Education, Indiana-Purdue Universities, 1954, Box 42, Bloomington, Indiana.

Good clear basic information; not necessary to read for those who have done much other reading in the field, but a good supplement to training course, $1.00.

How to Be a Modern Leader, National Board of YMCA, $1.00, Association Press, New York.

A short, readable little booklet on problems and philosophies of democratic leadership.

My Group and I, by Gordon Lippitt and Warren Schmidt, Educators' Washington Dispatch, Washington, D. C., 75¢

A 24-page manual showing what members can do to make their groups more productive.

Bibliography Corrections and changes

Books:

Trecker, Audrey and Harleigh, How to Work With Groups;New York Association Press, 1965 (Revised Edition of earlier book of same name, published by Association Press.)

Easy reading, practical advice for those working with voluntary organizations.

Potter, David and Anderson, Martin P., Discussion..A Guide to Effective Practice, Wadsworth Publishing Co., Inc., Belmont, California 1963.

An excellent combination of theory and practice, published in paper cover with tear sheets for working exercises. Especially valuable for those who train discussion leaders.

Pamphlets:

Adult Education Association: Address has been changed from Chicago to: 1225 19th St. N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036

18 Pamphlets now available in leadership series

ADULT LEADERSHIP Magazine has been in existance since 1952. Subscription price for magazine is currently $7.50 per year.

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